

Glossary of Sports Slang and Idioms Used in Casual American Conversation

Primary Source:
Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia,
List of sports idioms
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_sports_idioms>

ace – *Baseball*: A team's best starting pitcher. Also used as a verb, meaning "did very well." Example: "I aced that test today."

ball is in one's (or another's) court – *Tennis*: Responsibility now belongs to the person named; often in the sentence "The ball is in your court", meaning it is now up to you.

bare-knuckle – *Boxing*: Characterized by a fiercely unrelenting or implacable character, for example "bare-knuckle politics". Bare-knuckle boxing is the more savage precursor to forms of boxing that mandate gloves.

beat (someone) to the punch – *Boxing*: To make the first decisive move. A boxer who first strikes his opponent has beaten him to the punch.

beezers – *Boxing*: The nose. Example: "I got hit in the beezers."

behind the eight-ball. *From the game of pool*. In a very bad position, perhaps inextricably bad.

bench; on the bench; warm/ride the bench – To *bench* someone is to remove someone from participation; to be *on the bench* or to *warm* or *ride the bench* is to be so removed, to observe without participating, or to wait for one's chance to participate. A **bench-clearing fight** is a fight that breaks out on the playing field and draws all players from the dugout or bench.

blitz – *Football*. A defensive attack in football where several defensive players who normally cover running or passing routes rush the passer. In common usage, an intense campaign to get a job done, as in "I went on a housework blitz over the weekend."

blow-by-blow – *Boxing*: In reference to a verbal or written account, means providing great detail: for example, "a blow-by-blow description of the movie." Sometimes simplified to the nominal phrase "blow-by-blow" as in "You saw what happened, give me the blow-by-blow."

bowl over – *Cricket*: To astonish or overwhelm. The cricket term means to knock both of the bails off the wicket.

bump and run – *Football*. A technique used to slow down a player so something else can be accomplished on the field. Also, a car theft technique. One thief causes a fender bender. As the driver leaves the car to inspect the damage, an accomplice jumps in and drives off. Luxury cars are the usual target.

bush league – an amateur play or behavior.

carry the ball – *football, rugby*: To take charge, to assume responsibility. In some ball games (for example American or Canadian football, rugby, etc), the ball can be carried to advance toward a goal.

Cheap shot – A deliberate foul against an unsuspecting player. In conversation, an unfair or unsporting verbal attack on a vulnerable target. “That was a cheap shot, and you know it.”

come out fighting or **come out swinging** – *Boxing*: To go immediately on the offensive, often pre-emptively; or, to strongly defend oneself or one's beliefs

curve ball – *Baseball*. A pitch that veers to one side in order to trick the batter. Anything unexpected or designed to deceive. “That last question was a real curve ball,” or “What do you do when life throws you curve balls?”

down and out – *Boxing*: Lacking money or prospects; penniless or destitute. A boxer who is "down" has been knocked to the canvas, and one who is also "out" is unconscious or unable to resume the fight. Thus, a down-and-out person is utterly defeated.

down for the count; out for the count – *Boxing*: To be defeated. Refers to a boxer being knocked down; the referee will count off ten seconds, the time allotted for the boxer to regain his feet or lose the fight. *Down for the count* may imply a temporary setback, as *down* does not necessarily imply *out*.

down to the wire – *Horse racing*: To the very end or last minute. From the length of wire stretched across a racetrack at the finish line.

drop the ball – *Baseball, rugby, American football, etc*: To make an error, to miss an opportunity.

drop back and punt. *Football*. It means that you are running out of options and you need to go with your last resort, or cut your losses by moving away from the situation.

drop the gloves – *Ice hockey*: To engage in a fight, whether figurative or literal. Refers to the act of hockey players throwing off their gloves to punch with bare knuckles.

full-court press – *Basketball*: An all-out effort to exert pressure. In basketball, *full-court press* is an aggressive defense strategy in which the defenders put pressure on the opposing team over the entire court, trying to disrupt their dribbling and passing.

fumble – *Football*: When any offensive player loses possession of the ball before a play is blown dead. To touch or handle nervously, as in “I am fumbling for my keys.”

gambit – *Boxing*: A strategy or tactic; *chess*: an opening system that involves a pawn sacrifice to gain the initiative right from the start. Often used in the expression “opening gambit.”

get the ball rolling – *Some ball games*: To start an endeavor. Some ball games are started by rolling a ball into play. “John, why don’t you get the ball rolling at our staff meeting this morning?”

glass jaw – *Boxing*: Vulnerability, especially of a public figure, to destructive criticism. In boxing, a fighter who is especially vulnerable or susceptible to a knockout is said to have a glass jaw.

the gloves are off – *Boxing, Hockey*: See *take off the gloves*, below.

go the distance – *Boxing*: Carry through a course of action to completion. A boxer goes the distance when he can fight through all the scheduled rounds.

go to bat – *Baseball*. Stand up and support someone, or take someone’s side, usually in a dispute. “Why won’t you go to bat for me on this one?”

go to the mat – *Wrestling*: to engage in an argument or dispute, especially until one side is victorious. In wrestling, it means to engage in a wrestling bout, the mat being the surface on which the contest is fought.

move the goalposts – *Football*: to change the rules to make it difficult for others to achieve something. Could also mean to change the rules to make it easier.

Hail Mary – *Football*: any very long forward pass made in desperation with only a small chance of success, especially at or near the end of a half. A biblical, catholic prayer asking for the intercession of the virgin Mary. Hence, whenever someone calls out to God in desperation. Example: “We’ll just have to say a Hail Mary in that situation.”

hands down – *Horse racing*: With great ease; unconditionally; often (and originally) in the phrase *to win hands down*, in which a jockey, certain of victory, drops his hands relaxes his hold on the reins.

hang time – *Basketball*. Amount of time a player or ball is in the air. In common usage, people “hang around” or “hang out” with each other when they don’t have scheduled events to attend.

hat-trick – *Cricket*: A threefold feat in an endeavor. Achievement of a positive feat three times in a row. (However, in bowling, three strikes in a row is known as a “turkey.”)

have someone in your corner – *Boxing*: To have the support or help of someone.

heavy hitter – *Boxing*: An important or influential individual or organization. Refers to a boxer who is able to hit hard.

heavyweight – *Boxing*: A person of great influence or importance. In boxing, it is a weight division of 175 pounds (79.5 kg) or higher, or a boxer fighting in this division.

hit below the belt – *Boxing*: To act unfairly or unscrupulously, in disregard of the rules. To hit an opponent below the belt is an illegal move in boxing.

hit it out of the park – *Baseball*. When the batter hits the ball so hard, it flies out of the baseball park. Doing something very well.

hit a home run – *Baseball*. When the batter hits the ball and is able to run four bases without stopping, to score a point. Also called a homer, blast, dinger, four-bagger, tater or moon shot (a very long, high home run.)

home stretch or **homestretch** – *Horse racing*: The final phase of an endeavor or project. On a racecourse, the *home stretch* is the final part of track on which the race finishes.

hoops – slang term for the game of basketball. “Want to shoot some hoops with us this afternoon?”

huddle – when players on the field form a group to discuss an upcoming play. Also used as a verb. “Let’s huddle to come up with a strategy for that huge project.”

hurler on the ditch – *Hurling*: A non-participant who criticizes from outside. Derives from a spectator (typically a man too old to play anymore) criticizing the players while observing from the stands.

in-fighting, infighting – *Boxing*: Close-quarter fighting. Also, conflict between members of the same organization, often concealed from outsiders.

kayo, K.O. – *Boxing*: To put out of commission. From the boxing phrase “knockout” (knock unconscious), abbreviated “K.O.” and pronounced and often written as “kayo”.

keep one's eye on the ball – *Ball games*: To remain alert. In most games involving balls, it is important for players to keep track of the ball.

keep the ball rolling – *Some ball games*: To keep a conversation or endeavor from flagging. “I’ll rely on you to keep the ball rolling during the question and answer time.”

kisser. The mouth or face, as in “He got smacked right in the kisser.”

'lead with one's chin' – *Boxing*: To speak without caution, or to leave oneself unprotected. Refers to a boxer leaving his chin, a vulnerable point, unprotected.

lightweight' – *Boxing*: (A person or thing) of little importance, consequence, intelligence or ability. In boxing, it is a weight division of boxers weighing no more than 135 pounds or 60.7 kg.

'low blow' – *Boxing*: An unscrupulous or unfair attack, action, or insult. Refers to an illegal blow aimed at the area below another boxer's waist or belt.

Monday morning quarterback – *American football*: A person who criticizes or passes judgment with benefit of hindsight. *Monday morning* refers to the games played or broadcast on weekends, with criticisms leveled by a spectator the following week.

no holds barred – *Wrestling*: With all restrictions relaxed. The rules of wrestling *bar* or proscribe certain *holds* or grips on one's opponent.

by a nose – see *win by a nose*, below.

on deck – *Baseball*. The player who will bat next, after the one who is currently batting. Anyone whose turn is next and is preparing to take their turn.

on the ropes – *Boxing*: On the verge of defeat. Refers to a boxer who has been knocked against the ropes that enclose the boxing ring and kept there by the blows of his opponent.

one-two (punch), the old one-two – *Boxing* An attack consisting of two punches in rapid succession with alternate hands. **out for the count** – See *down for the count*, above.

play ball (with) – *Baseball*: To cooperate (with) or act fairly (with). Derives from a baseball umpire's call to "*Play ball!*" to start a game.

pull one's punches – *Boxing*: To use less force than one is capable of; to be gentle or lenient. In boxing, a boxer who holds back from using all his strength is said to pull his punches.

punch-drunk – *Boxing*: dazed, bewildered, or confused; or behaving in such a manner. In boxing, it refers to a disorder in boxers triggered by repeated dazing blows or punches to the head over an extended period of time.

punchy – *Boxing*: See *punch-drunk*, above; also, in a state of nervous tension, fatigued.

push it over the goal line – *Football*. Complete the activity or project, finish to job. Value of work often has little value until its completion. In American football, a team's drive to move the football down the field doesn't count until the ball crosses the goal line.

quarterback – *American football*: One who directs or leads; a mastermind; also used as a verb, *to quarterback*. It is also used as a term for a supporter or critic of a football team or game, and by extension, an uninvolved observer who criticizes or second-guesses.

redshirt – A college player who skips a year of play without losing eligibility. Can also be used in education to refer to a student who waits a year to enroll. Can also be used as a verb, as in “We could redshirt him for a year.”

ringer - *Horse racing*: An imposter, especially one who misrepresents his or her identity or ability in order to gain an advantage in a competition. Originally used in horse racing, when a fast horse was substituted for a slower one that it resembled, the term now applies to any athlete entered in a competition under false pretenses.

ringside judge – *Boxing*: A person who follows a topic or situation closely.

ringside seat, ringside table – *Boxing*: A place providing a good view of something. In boxing, a *ringside seat* is immediately adjacent to the ring in which the boxers fight, as is the *ringside table*.

roll with the punches – *Boxing*: To take adversity in stride; to adapt to difficult circumstances. A boxer who "rolls with the punches" moves his body away from the force of a blow so as to lessen their impact. “When you get into that heavy freeway traffic, you’re just going to have to roll with the punches.”

round – A single phase of an endeavor or contest: "The defense attorney went a couple of rounds with the ex-wife's lawyer."

run interference – *Football*: To handle problems for another person or to clear the way for another. In American football, a player who *runs interference* interferes or obstructs opponents to let the ball carrier advance.

saved by the bell – *Boxing*: to be saved from misfortune or unpleasantness by a timely interruption.

sideline; on/from the sidelines – To remove from participation. A player who is injured, benched or removed from play and forced to sit *on* or observe *from the sidelines*. Anytime a person is forced to quit active participation. “That illness sidelined him for a while.”

slam-dunk – *Basketball*: A forceful, dramatic move, especially against someone. In basketball, it is a forceful shot in which the player jumps to the basket and slams the ball in.

slap-happy – *Boxing*: Synonym for *punch-drunk*, above; also, dizzy with happiness; carefree, casual, thoughtless, irresponsible.

sparring partner – *Boxing*: A person with whom one routinely argues or enjoys arguing. Refers to a boxer who is hired to practise with another for training purposes.

square off – *Boxing*: To assume a fighting stance or attitude. In boxing, the term derives from the square shape of the ring, and the stance fighters assume immediately before the fight commences.

subway alumni – The followers of any college team who didn't attend or graduate from that institution.

sucker punch – *Boxing*: An unexpected blow. In boxing, a sucker punch is one delivered unexpectedly.

Sunday punch – *Boxing*: A destructive blow to an opponent as in "knocked him into next Sunday". In boxing, a Sunday punch is a knockout blow.

take a dive — *Boxing*: To pretend or feign, with intent to deceive. Refers to boxers who would pretend to be knocked out by a light or even non-existent punch, thus intentionally losing the fight; this was one method of losing a "fixed" fight (one with an unlawfully prearranged outcome)

take it on the chin – *Boxing*: To suffer misfortune or defeat. It alludes to taking a physical blow on the chin;

take off the gloves – *Boxing, ice hockey*: To attack earnestly, without mercy. Boxing gloves are worn for protection of the boxer's hands and to lessen the impact of the punches; bare-knuckle boxing is much more savage and dangerous. Used also in ice hockey, as two (or more) players signal their intention to [fight](#) by dropping their gloves.

take the (full) count – *Boxing*: To be defeated. Refers to a boxer being knocked down, the referee counting off ten seconds, the time allotted for the boxer to regain his feet or lose the fight. A boxer who takes the full count accepts defeat.

throw in the towel – *Boxing*: To surrender, admit defeat. Originally *throw up the sponge* or *chuck up the sponge*;

throw one's hat into the ring – *Boxing*: To signify one's candidacy for (political) office or election; to enter a contest. In early days of boxing, one signified a challenge by throwing one's hat into the boxing ring.

thursday morning tippy tappys – *Soccer*: A person who criticizes or passes judgement with benefit of hindsight. Thursday morning refers to the Champions League games played or broadcast midweek, usually on Wednesday nights.

under the wire – *Horse racing*: At the very last moment; in the nick of time; barely within some accepted parameters or limits. "The report was handed in just under the wire." Or, "At five-foot-five, he was under the wire for the height requirement for enlistment." From the practice of stretching a wire over the finish line at a racetrack.

utility player – a player who fills in at many positions. "So many people were out sick today at work, I felt like a utility player."

win by a nose – *Horse racing*: To succeed by a very narrow margin. "Our bid for the construction contract won by a nose." In horse racing, it describes a win so close that only the nose of the winning horse came in ahead of the other.

wheelhouse — *Baseball*: A person's area of expertise, or where they are most comfortable. In baseball this is the part of an individual's swinging range in which as a hitter they can make the best contact with the ball. If a pitch is right in your wheelhouse it is right where you want it, in the spot where you have the best chance of hitting it well.

work out, work-out, workout — To exercise or practice, especially in terms of physical training.